

# The Bundaberg Waterworks of 1902

## A long wait worthwhile...

In 1877, the Bundaberg settlement's water supply was provided by an interim scheme consisting of an in-ground circular brick tank built around a spring in Tantitha Park, and hand-filled water carts for delivery. When the settlement was constituted a municipality in 1881, the Municipal Council moved to provide a supply to better meet the health, comfort and safety requirements of its citizens.

Over 20 years would elapse before these needs were satisfied by the commissioning of the 1902 Bundaberg Waterworks scheme. Several issues delayed completion, including the economic crisis of the 1890s. However, this scheme with its landmark tower would serve Bundaberg for many years, at a price the citizens could afford.



Baldwin Swamp, the water source for the Bundaberg Waterworks in 1902.  
(Picture Bundaberg Collection, Image bun00573)

## A masterpiece of engineering design and construction

The 1902 scheme sourced its water from Baldwin Swamp and comprised three major parts:

- a steam powered pumping station and intake located at the end of Victoria Street;
- a water tower comprising a 40,000 gallon (182 kilolitre) mild steel tank on a 28 foot 9 inch (8.76 metre) diameter, 106 foot (32.31 metre) high cylindrical brick tower; and
- a 10 inch (254 millimetre) cast iron trunk delivery main to Bourbong Street with a network of smaller mains distributing water to about 800 properties.

A Bundaberg landmark for over a century, the 1902 Water Tower remains intact and in service today, a remarkable and robust relic of late 19th century water supply technology. Unfortunately, no fabric remains of the pumping station or the reticulation network.



The water tower under construction in 1902.  
(Picture Bundaberg Collection, Image bun01088)



The completed water tower circa 1905.  
(State Library of Queensland neg no. APO-009-0001-0018)

## Technical and aesthetic excellence

The tower is a fine example of the art of the industrial designers of the Queensland Water Supply Department including Queensland Hydraulic Engineer J.B. Henderson. It also demonstrates the bricklaying skills of the builder N.C. Steffensen. Construction required work from scaffolding at heights of up to 30 metres above ground. Despite these difficulties, his peers regarded Steffensen's work as a "masterpiece of bricklaying", displaying as it does complex masonry and brickwork with its arched windows and projecting bands of brickwork.

Building the mild steel (which was an early use of mild steel) tank also required great skill. A contemporary report noted:

‘The reservoir had to be built in position, an undertaking that will at once be conceded to be most difficult, and one calling for an abundance of resourcefulness on the part of those engaged in the work, but it was most successfully completed by the Bundaberg Foundry. In this regard it may be mentioned as a most noteworthy feature in view of the difficulty of the work, that when the reservoir was tested not a solitary leak or faultily driven rivet was discovered.’



Bundaberg circa 1903, looking east along Bourbong Street to the water tower (circled) in East Bundaberg. This was the route of the trunk water main in 1902. (State Library of Queensland neg no.203168)

